

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Legendary Traditions about the Tower of Hercules (A Coruña, Spain)

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Abstract

This article offers a general presentation of the myths and legends associated with the ancient Roman lighthouse of A Coruña (Spain) known as the Tower of Hercules. It reviews legends collected by Alfonso X in his *History of Spain* (the battle between Hercules and Geryon, or invasion of the Almujuces), as well as earlier versions of them, a number of traditions with similar characteristics, and other stories related to the monument, such as the Irish tradition of the Tower of Breogan or the Iberian tale of Trezenzonius.

Throughout history, human societies have felt attracted by many monuments of the past. Once awakened, human curiosity provides an explanation—often of a mythical or legendary origin—through stories and other narratives that represent an attempt to account for the creation of these monuments, their re-use, and their newly revised cultural significance.¹

There are countless instances of these processes, even from prehistoric times (Bradley 2002), and Galicia in northwest Spain has many examples of this process of creating myths and legends to explain material remains from the past. Evidence of this includes popular traditions relating to supernatural characters such as the *mouros* and *mouras* of the Galician countryside (Aparicio Casado 1999) and their associations with megalithic constructions, hillforts, and the like.² These mythical and legendary stories enrich the heritage value of the monuments to which they refer.

The Tower of Hercules, a lighthouse in the city of A Coruña in Galicia, originally a Roman structure, offers a magnificent example of this type of situation (Figure 1). The Roman monument was built at the start of the second century AD, in all likelihood under the direction of Gaius Sevius Lupus, a Lusitanian architect from Aeminium (Coimbra) who left a rock inscription, which still stands at the base of the tower, dedicating it to Mars Augustus (Hauschild and Hutter 1991; Le Roux 1990). After the fall of the Empire, the history of the Roman monument was one of abandonment and deterioration throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern era, up until the renovation carried out by Giannini in the eighteenth century (Bello Diéguez 1994). It was precisely within this context, leading to its rundown state, that the tower became the focus of a variety of legends which attempted to explain its creation. The monument began to play a main role within the narrative logic of these stories, although, curiously, the inscription did not play any part in explaining the origin of the Tower of Hercules until the appearance in 1544 of the *Crónica General de España* (General Chronicle of Spain) by Florián de



Figure 1. The Tower of Hercules, A Coruña, Spain. Photograph by the author.

Ocampo. He was the first author to mention and offer a transcription of the text of the epigraph, at the same time as transmitting the legendary version that, as we will see, was created by Alfonso X. Ocampo's authority meant that his ideas were taken up by subsequent authors, who merely repeated his arguments or simply mentioned the existence of the inscription. The criticism of the legendary tradition and the defence of the Roman origins of the monument—based on the epigraph and other data—began in 1559, with the *Corografía de alguns lugares* (Chorography of certain places) by Gaspar Barreiros, coming to the fore in the eighteenth century with authors such as Henrique Flórez in *España Sagrada* (Sacred Spain, 1765) or the *Investigaciones sobre la fundación y fábrica de la Torre, llamada de Hercules* (Investigations into the foundation and construction of the tower, said to be of Hercules) by José Cornide (1792). Proof of the importance of the legendary tradition in Spanish historiography can be seen in the work of authors who, from 1607, with the *Memorias del Arzobispado de Santiago* (Memoirs from the Archbishopric of Santiago) of Jerónimo del Hoyo, until 1747 with the *Población General de España* (General population of Spain) of Juan Antonio de Estrada, combined the legend and the epigraph, considering that the Roman construction of the monument was in fact a reconstruction or remodelling.³



Figure 2. The Iberian Peninsula showing main sites mentioned in the text. Map drawn by Anxo Rodríguez Paz. Used with permission.

From Ancient Traditions to Medieval Legends

In antiquity, the Roman lighthouse of A Coruña played a major role as one of the geographical locations used to indicate the extent of the Iberian Peninsula (Figure 2). This can be inferred from Paulus Orosius's *A History against the Pagans* (Fear 2010, 44). This geographical tradition was continued in the Middle Ages and later, both by Christian geographers and cartographers (including the *Cosmographia* by Aethicus of Istria, and the various world maps of Henry of Mainz, of the *Saint Beatus of Liébana's Commentary on the Apocalypse*, and of Hereford Cathedral) and their counterparts from the Muslim world (Al-Maqqarī's *Nafḥ al-Ṭīb min Ghuṣn al-Andalus al-Raṭīb wa-Dhikr Wazīrihā Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb* [Breath of perfumes from the branch of fresh Andalus and the memoir of its Vizier Lisān al-Dīn ibn al-Khaṭīb], al-Bakrī's *Kitāb al-Masālik wa-l-Mamālik* [Book of roads and kingdoms], and al-Ḥimyārī's *Kitāb al-Rawḍ al-Mi'ṭār* [Book of the perfumed garden]).

Local toponyms also reveal that the tower played a central and defining role with regards to its surroundings, not only in the academic tradition, but also within popular culture. After the decline and abandonment of the Roman settlement of A Coruña, the ancient Latin place name, *Flavium Brigantium*, disappeared from the registers and this coastal location became in medieval times *Farum Brecantium* or just *Farum* (from *pharos*, Greek and Latin for 'lighthouse')—a very meaningful example of the impact that the Roman monument's remains had on the local population.⁴ This place name in turn would disappear after 1208, when the city was re-founded by order of Alfonso IX under the denomination of 'A Coruña' (Bello Diéguez 1994, 80–116).

The importance of the remains of this Roman construction explains the appearance of legendary traditions in medieval historiography linking the origins of the tower to the tales of Hercules; and particularly the hero's tenth labour, to steal the cattle of Geryon. Before that time, classical sources situated the combat in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, on the island of Erytheia, governed by Geryon, a place mainly identified by ancient authors with Tartessos and Cadiz.

This myth is told by many ancient authors: Hesiod, Pindar, Diodorus Siculus, and Pseudo-Apollodorus;⁵ Stesichorus's *Geryoneis*; Aeschilus's *Heraclids*, whose only preserved fragment summarizes the myth's main features; Panyassis, an epic author from the first half of the fifth century BC; and Nicomachus of Alexandria's third-century BC *Geryoneis*; as well as many other long-lost works such as the *Heracleia* by Peisander, an author who collected in the seventh century BC—probably for the first time ever—every single work about Heracles, decisively contributing to their canonical shaping. Among the Latin writers, Justin's historic and rationalized version in his *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus* is well worth a mention.⁶

In general, the story told in these works follows a common narrative pattern: Eurystheus orders Heracles/Hercules, as one of the twelve labours which he has to carry out for him, to steal the miraculous livestock that belongs to Geryon, who rules an island located beyond the Ocean, called Erytheia. Hercules travels to the west, where he confronts Geryon, an individual with three heads or three bodies, his dog Orthos, and the herdsman Eurytion, whom he overwhelms and kills before returning to Greece with the cattle. One of the main variations has to do with Hercules's trip to the west, which according to some authors (such as Stesichorus, Apollodorus, Panyassis, and Peisander) took place in the 'Cup of the Sun'.

In antiquity, this myth was already located in various other parts of the Peninsula. Servius, in his *Commentary on Virgil*, tells us that Geryon was the King of Mallorca, Menorca, and Ibiza, and therefore was mistakenly considered triple, while Pomponius Mela places his kingdom in Lusitania.⁷ This last author could have influenced the direct sources of Alfonso X, who, as a complete novelty, situated this confrontation in the northwest of the Peninsula.

Hispanic medieval traditions regarding the combat of Hercules and Geryon and the construction of the Tower of A Coruña begin with *De rebus Hispaniae* (Concerning the events of Spain) by the Archbishop Ximénez de Rada, a work dated to the end of the twelfth century or the early thirteenth century (Fernández Valverde 1987, 1989), and *Muluk Al-Andalus* of Al-Razi, an Arabic text dating from the tenth century that only partially survives in three manuscripts, with textual variants, containing the Spanish version of a Portuguese translation dated around the year 1300 and known as *Crónica del Moro Rasis* (The Chronicle of Rasis the Moor) (Catalán Menéndez-Pidal and Andrés 1974). Their versions of the story are as follows.⁸

Ximénez de Rada, *De Rebus Hispaniae*

This Carpetania—which covers four areas: Oca, Calahorra, Tarazona, and Auripa, later called Cesaraugusta by Caesar Augustus—was occupied by the mighty Roman princes, even though, according to Plinius and Sisebut, it belonged to the Cartaginense province. As they moved forward to other areas of Hesperia, they named the lands after themselves and gave them their own culture; the provinces had different leaders, including Geryon and others who lived up until the time of Hercules (bk 1, chap. 3, lines 31–39).

... and on the edge of Hesperia, he [Hercules] built a port for his vessels; on the same location he raised two very sturdy towers which are still today called Hercules's Gades,⁹ in such a way that they represented a remembrance for those who were to come. In that time, a prince called Geryon lived in Hesperia; he had a wealth of all sorts of livestock, and he owned three kingdoms now known as Galicia, Lusitania, and Betica; this Geryon was strong and ruthless; he has traditionally been portrayed as having three heads. So goes Ovid in his *Metamorphoses's* ninth book: I was not moved either by the Iberian shepherd's triple appearance, nor by yours, Cerberus, triple too. Likewise, in the *Heroides* book: Geryon, a wealthy Iberian livestock breeder, was a triple prodigy: he was one in three. Virgil wrote more exhaustively on this death, in the *Aeneid's* book VII: When Tirintius, victorious after having killed Geryon, reached the Laurentius fields and bathed the Iberian cows in the river Tyrrhenian. Hercules battled Geryon and, in spite of his fearsome bravery, he subjugated him during several fights and defeated him, taking away his life, his properties and his cattle; the part of Hesperia that he conquered was handed to the people who came with him from Galacia, so that they could populate it; that is why Galicia, Spain's fifth province, got its name from the Galatians, although some people hold that it has a different origin (bk 1, chap. 4, lines 16–35). (Fernández Valverde 1989, 65–67 and 70–71)

Chronicle of Rasis the Moor (Copenhagen manuscript version)

Chapter 53: On how Hercules came to Spain, took all of it over by force and founded many villages in it. We also know that Hercules came to Spain at once when it was properly populated and after learning that King Geryon, the last of the descendants of Tubal, had killed another king called Auides. He arranged his vessels and supplies and arrived at Cadiz; then he travelled to the hinterland. As soon as he heard such news, Geryon went in his pursuit. Both sides fought. Geryon was killed by Hercules along with many of his loyal followers. Those who survived fled; they felt lost without their king. With Geryon's death, the lineage of Spanish kings that had begun with King Tubal came to an end and never returned. (Catalán Menéndez-Pidal and Andrés 1974, 314; see pp. 126–27 for versions from other manuscripts)

The version of the story written by King Alfonso X in his *History of Spain* reads as follows:¹⁰

Chapter 7. On how Hercules faced King Geryon and killed him.

When Hercules arrived at that location [Lisbon], he heard of a very powerful king in Hesperia who owned the lands between the rivers Tajo and Duero; as his rule spanned seven provinces, the old tales used to have it that he had seven heads. This king was Geryon, a very strong and deft giant; he conquered the lands by force and all the inhabitants were obliged to give him half of anything they owned, including sons and daughters, and anyone not complying with this would be killed. Thus, everyone hated him, but they would not dare face him as they lacked protection, but when they learnt that Hercules had arrived, an envoy went and told him that he, who had done so many good things and who had freed so many people from difficulties and tyrannies, should come around to help them, and they would relinquish all of their lands to him. When Hercules heard this, he readily agreed and resolved to go there. Even though he belonged to the lineage of the giants and was mighty, that did not mean that he was cruel or of unjust lordship; indeed, he was kind to the good people and brave and strong to the bad. As he heard those people's complaints, he felt compassionate and went over to help them. When Geryon learned about this, he travelled with his host to the place where the city known as Crunna would later be located, which was empty so far. Hercules had someone go and tell Geryon that there was no need for other people to kill or hurt each other and that they could fight one on one, so that whoever was victorious would keep all of the lands for himself. Geryon, brave as he was, and older as well, said he agreed. So they fought for three days, during which neither could defeat the other; eventually, Hercules prevailed and beheaded his rival. And he decreed that a very high tower be built on that location, and that Geryon's head be buried in the foundations, and that a great city be populated there. The first inhabitant to come was a woman called Crunna, hence the city name. (Menéndez Pidal 1955, 1: 9)

Reading these versions reveals how much the tale of Alfonso X differs from those of Ximénez de Rada and Al-Rasis, although their tales appear to be the basis for the version included in the seventh chapter of the *History of Spain*: the Tower of Hercules was built, as Hercules decreed, on the site in which was buried the head of Geryon, the local tyrant defeated by the Greek hero. This is shown on the coat of arms of A Coruña (Figure 3). According to Alfonso X, Hercules also founded the city of A Coruña next to the tower, which was named after its first inhabitant (González García 1997, 99–103). This legendary tradition became canonical and survived throughout the centuries in different histories and chronicles of Hispania, up until it was discredited in the eighteenth century (Tate 1970, 123–82), along with many other tales that used to account for the Greek presence in Galicia in ancient times (Moralejo 2008, 77–78).

With regards to the story being situated in A Coruña, relocated from the south of the Peninsula, it is likely that it was influenced by the similarity between the Roman lighthouse of Brigantium and the tower, or towers, which, according to Ximénez de Rada, Hercules had built in Cadiz. These legendary constructions relate to the existence of the old city's remains on that site, and particularly of the temple dedicated to Hercules (Carracedo Fraga 1991; Ordóñez Agulla 1993; Gómez Espelosín, Cruz Andreotti, and García Quintela 2007, 386–90 and 393–94).



Figure 3. Modern copy of a coat of arms in A Coruña from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Façade of number 17 on Herrerías Street, A Coruña. Photograph by the author.

The ancient remains of Cadiz had already spurred the curiosity of early Christian authors, including Isidore of Seville who mentions Herculean legends such as the foundation of the hero's famous pillars (Barney et al. 2006, 277). The influence of Arab works contributed to this topic being transferred to Iberian Christian historiography, from Ximénez de Rada (Fernández Valverde 1987, 15; 1989, 66–67) and the mid fourteenth-century Portuguese *Chronicle of 1344* (Lindley Cintra 1951–54, 2: 19–20) to the fifth chapter of Alfonso X's *History of Spain* (Menéndez Pidal 1955, 1: 8) and the *Chronicle of Rasis the Moor* (Catalán Menéndez-Pidal and Andrés 1974, 126–27), which consistently refer to Hercules as the builder of the Cadiz tower and the creator of the idol on its top. From then on, the towers in Cadiz and Galicia were considered to be related to each other because of their similarities, and mainly because they shared the same builder: Hercules. This had already been claimed by a number of Muslim authors, and continued with those writing as late as the seventeenth century, such as Al-Maqqarī (Richthofen 1989, 180–81), and with Christian writers. Except for Lucas de Tuy, who in his thirteenth-century *Chronicon mundi* (World chronicle) attributes the tower to Julius Caesar (Falque 2003, 80–82), and Ximénez de Rada, who refers to a certain Hispan as being the builder of the towers of A Coruña and Cadiz, and of the aqueduct of Segovia (Fernández Valverde 1987, 18–19; 1989, 70–71), sources from this period such as the early twelfth-century *Pseudo-Isidorian Chronicle* (González Muñoz 2000, 110–11), Alfonso's *History of Spain*, the *Chronicle of Rasis the Moor*, and the *Chronicle of 1344* (Lindley Cintra 1951–54, 2: 22–25 and 30–32; Fernández-Ordóñez 2000, 111), more or less directly associate Hercules with the construction of the tower of A Coruña (Carlos Villamarín 1996, 292–93). It is therefore likely that the similarities between the monuments of A Coruña and Cadiz acted as forces of attraction to this new location of the combat and explain the origin of the monument of Galicia.¹¹

Possible Celtic Background and Other Similar Traditions

The chronicles of Alfonso X feature a number of elements, such as Geryon's beheading and the construction of the tower on the place where his head was buried, which are absent from their direct medieval sources.¹² It seems likely that the bookish and scholarly account of Alfonso X also conceals ancient elements transmitted by an oral tradition, possibly of Celtic—or even Indo-European—origin. These elements include decapitation,¹³ the triplicity of Geryon (manifested in this account as the three days of combat),¹⁴ the resolution of the conflict through one-on-one combat,¹⁵ and the underlying suggestion of a cattle-raid from the classical myth concealed within this tale.¹⁶

The theme of the beheading of Geryon and his burial in a place used as a lookout, as was the location of the lighthouse of A Coruña, has a direct parallel in the story of the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*, a medieval Welsh prose tale probably written in the twelfth century (Ford 1977, 2). In this tale, the head of Bran the Blessed is buried in the *Gwynfryn*, 'White Hill', near the current location of the Tower of London, where it acted as a protective talisman for the island of Britain, preventing its conquest (Ford 1977, 69–70).¹⁷ These legendary and mythical themes may be indicating the survival of oral traditions beneath the erudite wrapping of Alfonso's stories (González García 1998, 75–86). Other modern scholars rely on the fact that the *Chronicle of Rasis the Moor* offers the oldest

version of this story, and thus consider it an Arab invention, developed from the classical myth of Geryon and Hercules, to explain the origins of the Roman monument (Catalán Menéndez-Pidal and Andrés 1974, lxi–lxix; Fernández-Ordóñez 1992, 195–96).¹⁸

Chapter Fourteen of Alfonso's chronicle seems to support the possible existence of a Celtic background in the mythical and legendary traditions associated with the Tower of Hercules:

On how the Almujuces took over Spain and became their lords.

After King Piro's death, Spain came under the control of the Greeks, and so it remained until the uprising of a people called the Almujuces, who worshipped fire. When their children were born, they would set a fire using dry wood, so that the flame was clear and made no smoke; the naked baby would be held and moved as in a cross, from the East to the West and from the North to the South, which functioned as some sort of baptism. They went even further—when a man was very old, hated life, and wanted to set away to paradise, he would be burnt in fire, and they had it that he would be going straight to God. This sect was primarily founded in Chaldea, and it lasted there up until they were known by the wise men and the emperors, such as Nebuchadnezzar and Xerxes, who destroyed it on the grounds of considering it a proof of insanity, and they killed those who refused to leave it. Some fled towards the cold islands and also to Norway, Dacia, and Prussia; they populated those areas, won over their lands; then began to build many ships and became very powerful on the seas. They resolved to conquer other lands near the ocean, starting in England and the rest of the isles—Scotland, Ireland, and Wales; then they came by sea until they reached Spain where Bayona is now located. They heard of the mirror held by a statue in the tower of Crunna in which the ships coming could be seen, and got some advice on how to evade it. They took two ships and filled them with green trees standing, so that they looked like islands, and in them they put lots of strong lathe-made crossbows. Those in the tower guarding the mirror thought they were seeing small islands, and the crew got closer and closer to the mountain, and when they were at its base they shot their crossbows and broke the mirror. They let the rest of the fleet know, so that the other ships came and took the village by force, and killed anyone they found ... (Menéndez Pidal 1955, 1: 14)

Here, the tower plays a central role in the legendary invasion of the Almujuces. This story has a strong link with different Indo-European legendary traditions, particularly Celtic ones, through the topic of the battling forest, whose best-known example is in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with the prophecy of the witches (act 4, scene 1):

Be lion-mettled, proud and take no care
Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are.
Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him. (lines 90–94)

This is followed later by the announcement of the tragic end of Macbeth with the plant camouflage that Malcolm designs to hide the true size of his army from the enemy (act 5, scene 2):

Let every soldier hew him down a bough,
And bear't before him. Thereby shall we shadow
The numbers of our host and make discovery
Err in report of us. (lines 4–7)

The origins of the motif of the battling forest may date back to early Near Eastern or Egyptian stories collected by ancient Greek and Arab authors. Thus, for example, Achilles

Tatius in *Leucippe and Clitophon* tells us the stratagem devised by the Egyptians when they saw the satrap's troops approaching:

They collected all their old men and provided them with branches of palm, to make them look like suppliants, while behind them they drew up the flower of their youth, armed with shield and spear; the veterans were to hold the branches aloft, so as to hide those in the rear behind the foliage, while the latter were to keep their spears horizontal and trail them along the ground, so that they might not be apparent. (Gaselee 1917, 217–21)

Compare also the Arabic story of Zarqa' al-Yamamah in *Kitāb al-aghānī*: she was a woman whose exceptional vision allowed her to see the army, hidden behind branches of trees, coming to attack her city, but whose warning (unfortunately for her people) was not believed (Norris 1983, 377–78).

However, the topic is present in the traditions of a number of Indo-European peoples through different literary adaptations and explanations of the folk motif about the magic battling forest: from narratives with trees and plants actually fighting, such as those in the Welsh poem *Cat Goddeu*¹⁹ (Ford 1977, 184–87) or the B version of *The Death of Cú Chulainn* (Le Roux 1959, 198–205), to those in which, as in *Macbeth*, this combat becomes a strategy using plants or wood: *Gesta Regum Francorum*, chapter 36 (Bachrach 1973, 90–91); Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, book 5, chapter 4 (Elton 1894, 184–85); *Gesta Treverorum continuatio prima*, chapter 9 (Waitz 1848, 182–83); the saga of St Olaf in Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (Niedner 1965, 34–35); and *The Battle of Ross Na Ríg* (Hogan 1892, 43–45). There are also variants in which, as a result of the distance involved, an army is confused with a forest: *Mesca Ulad* (Gantz 1981, 199–203) is one variation; another occurs in *The Second Branch of the Mabinogi* when Bran the Blessed's army advances over the sea towards Ireland (Ford 1977, 66).²⁰

In Alfonso's account of the invasion by the Almujuces, we can also see the footprint of commonplace elements in folklore and ancient and medieval ethnography. This is most apparent when it comes to recounting the invader's religion, the children's baptism of fire, or the exposure of the elderly (González García 2001, 359–67) and the presence of topics of an Eastern origin, such as the magic mirror, a theme developed for the lighthouse of Alexandria that, before being added to the Tower of Hercules's *imaginarium*, had been linked with the ancient remains of Cadiz (Delpech 1997, 65; González García 2001, 344–45). The magic mirror is also present in other stories related to the Tower of A Coruña prior to Alfonso's writings; some with clear Celtic links, as we will see below in the case of *The Voyage of Trezenonius*, offering another possible explanation for this motif.

The tradition about the magic mirror of the Tower of Hercules not only survived in Hispanic chronicles, but also in other medieval and early modern works. Around 1350, this story is told in title 51 of Leomarte's *Sumas de Historia Troyana* (Summary of Trojan history) that also includes the construction of the tower by Hercules as a commemoration of his triumph over Geryon. It notes that Hercules also placed a copper image on top of the tower holding a magic mirror in its hand, which made it possible to foresee any attack, and a magic lamp that did not require oil (Carlos Villamarín 1996, 293, n. 28). This latter tradition can also be found in *Recueil des histoires de Troye* (Compendium of Trojan stories) by Raul Le Fèvre, with the notable variation of attributing the strategy of plant camouflage to Nebuchadnezzar, as well as the destruction of the magic lamp and mirror (Krappe 1931, 193).

The connections between the tower and certain Celtic motifs spread beyond these legendary traditions and medieval and modern Hispanic historiographic narrative. Among them, it is worth mentioning the series of reports collected in the Irish *Leabhar Ghabhala* (Book of invasions), dating from the twelfth century, which in turn recovers more ancient traditions and mythical tales that were deeply euhemerized and Christianized by the medieval Irish monks who composed the texts (Mhaonaigh 2006, 45–48). This book reports on the Tower of Hercules, here called the Tower of Breogan (a legendary and mythical conqueror of Spain and the founder of both the monument and Brigantia, the Iberian city where it stands) and links it, among other traditions, to the invasion of Ireland by Íth, Breogan's son. The account says that the tower was the vantage point from where he spied Ireland before leaving Galicia for the island with the intention of populating it:

As for Íth, son of Breogan, it was he who found Ireland the first. He came alone, on a clear winter's evening, on to the top of Breogan's Tower, and began to spy out the sea far to the north-east, till he saw Ireland away from him. He goes round back thereafter to his other brethren, and tells them what he had seen. Brego son of Breogan said that what he had seen was no land at all, but a cloud of the sky, and he was for hindering him from going thither; but Íth he could in no wise hinder. [Íth] launched his ship on the sea and sailed to Ireland, with thrice fifty warriors; till they landed on the 'Fetid Shore' of Mag Ítha, on the Northern side of Ireland. (Macalister 1956, 11–12)

Thus, the tower plays a fundamental role in the mythical explanation of the populating of Ireland, by being the place from where the invasion and conquest of the island by 'the sons of Míl' began. This was a legendary population of Iberian origin to whom the sons of Breogan belonged. They were the first humans who inhabited Ireland, after defeating and exiling underground the race of gods who had formerly inhabited the island, the *Tuatha Dé Danann*. As previously mentioned, Galicia—as documented through linguistic sources—was an area with a clearly Celtic presence in ancient time, and it is perhaps this common Celtic link with Ireland in the past that explains the origin of some of the similarities we have found, together with others examined below.²¹

With regards to the links between the tower and its surroundings and Celtic themes, we should also mention one last legendary tradition that shares some motifs with those we have already mentioned: *The Voyage of Trezenzonius* (Díaz y Díaz 1985, 95–119), which includes the magic mirror and the sighting of an island from the tower. This is a medieval Galician legend dated by Díaz y Díaz to around the year 1000, or perhaps 1025–50, making it earlier than both the Irish text describing Íth's sighting of Ireland and Alfonso's tradition of the tower's magic mirror. This fact could lead us to consider that there was once a Galician myth or legend related to the tower that contained both features.

The Voyage of Trezenzonius is a narration of the trip undertaken by this monk from Galicia to the island of 'Solistitio' (Solstice). He departed from Brigantium, whose lighthouse would have allowed him to see the island thanks to a magic mirror it contained. Solistitio, according to the tale, was a wonderful, rich location where Trezenzonius stayed for seven years, before travelling back only to find an unpopulated Galicia, where he came across the ruins of the lighthouse of A Coruña and the city of Cesarea, which was almost completely destroyed.²²

With regard to its narrative genre, Trezenzonius's legend is a Christianization of the Celtic voyage to the Otherworld, adapted to medieval Galician tradition. Based on the

similarities between this story and the Irish medieval genre of *immrama* (literally, 'rowing about'; sea-voyages to Otherworld islands), such as the well-known and hugely popular *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (Voyage of St Brendan), Chet Van Duzer proposed that the latter may have been used as sources in Trezenzonius's tale (Duzer 2008, 338; with English translation, 339–41). Nevertheless, Van Duzer considers that the Galician legend was not a mere adaptation of Irish traditions to the Galician cultural sphere, but very possibly a rendition of a tradition of its own, evidence of which includes the obvious differences when compared with the Irish stories.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the Tower of Hercules is very much a legendary lighthouse. The ancient Roman monument is the focal point where a whole series of mythic and legendary traditions converge from a wide variety of origins: erudite and popular, Celtic and Eastern, pagan and Christian. All of these tales attempted to explain the origins of the tower, amongst other things. This is a type of 'merger process', which according to Jean Seznec converted the ancient deities during the Middle Ages into 'hybrid and phantom gods', together with their myths (1961, 149). This is the only way of explaining, within the myth of Hercules, elements such as the decapitation, the construction of the monument, and the configuration of the hero as a benefactor of mankind and the builder of wonders such as the tower. The tower itself was a structure that attracted and absorbed (within the assortment of legends explaining its origin) a range of other legendary themes, such as the tale of the battling forest (rationalized into a military strategy using plants); the magic mirror; and the magical watchtower, a feature that Alfonso's version shares with both Irish origin myths and with local Christian traditions. In the case of these legendary traditions, the common ancient narrative pattern of the story of Hercules and Geryon did not recover—with the arrival of the Renaissance—its classical form, free of all medieval additions. Instead, at this time, all of these legendary medieval traditions merged with the classic myth into a single version. The most obvious evidence of this process is the fusion of all these traditions into the information about Geryon provided by Juan Pérez de Moya in book 4, chapter 11 of his *Philosophia secreta de la gentilidad* (Pagan secret philosophy), a treatise on Greek-Roman mythology published in Madrid in 1585 (Pérez de Moya 1995, 458–61) in which the classical aspects of the myth, which were now recovered, were mixed together in explaining the tenth task of Hercules, with all of the legendary traditions we have already seen in this paper. The predominance of the legendary explanation only began to disappear in the eighteenth century, especially with the publication of *España Sagrada* (Sacred Spain) by Enrique Flórez, which is when the mainly Roman origins of the tower began to be defended, thereby replacing the mythical and legendary explanations with historical ones.

Notes

- ¹ This process has never ended, giving rise to continuous re-interpretations of the monument in different periods (Barrett 1999; Champion and Cooney 1999).
- ² In most cases these are folktales in which this kind of character is associated with archaeological remains that they are said to have used as dwellings, and also with a treasure trove (Arizaga Castro and Ayán Vila 2007, 452–57). This is similar to certain Irish fairy tales (Champion and Cooney 1999, 192–93).

- ³ On all of these historiographic publications, see Romero Masiá (1991).
- ⁴ The second element of the toponym *Flavium Brigantium* is obviously of Celtic origin (Sims-Williams 2006, 54) and helps to identify the Celtic presence in the northwestern Iberian Peninsula in ancient times, both at a linguistic level (Luján Martínez 2006) and in terms of its ideology and culture (García Quintela 2005). This Celtic cultural heritage may explain, as we will see in this paper, many of the aspects associated with the legends of the Tower of Hercules.
- ⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 287–94 (Evelyn-White 1914, 100–101); Pindar, *Isthmian Ode* 1, lines 13–15 (Sandys 1915, 438–39); Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, book 4, chapters 17–19 (Oldfather 1968, 2: 397–406); and Pseudo-Apollodorus, *The Library*, book 2, chapter 5, paragraph 10 (Frazer 1921, 210–19).
- ⁶ Book 44, chapter 4, paragraphs 14–16; Latin text and English translation: <http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/justin/english/>
- ⁷ Maurus Servius Honoratus, *Commentary on Virgil's Aeneid*, book 7, line 662 (Latin text: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collection?collection=Perseus:collection:Greco-Roman>); and Pomponius Mela, *Chorography*, book 3, chapter 47 (Romer 1998, 114–15; Brodersen 1994, 160–61).
- ⁸ All of the English translations of the Hispanic literary sources in this article are by the author, and have been translated from the works indicated in each particular case.
- ⁹ The Latin name of the Spanish city of Cadiz.
- ¹⁰ The standard edition of the works of Alfonso X is by Menéndez Pidal (1955).
- ¹¹ St Isidore of Seville *Etymologies*, book 13, chapter 15, paragraph 2; Ximénez de Rada, *Historia de rebus Hispanie*, book 1, chapters 4 and 7; *Chronicle of 1344*, chapters 6, 7, and 10; Alfonso X's *History of Spain*, chapter 5; *Chronicle of Rasis the Moor*, chapters 51–52; Lucas de Tuy, *Chronicon mundi*, book 1, chapter 97; and *Pseudo-Isidorian Chronicle*, chapter 1.
- ¹² There is no doubt that *Rasis* was used by Ximénez de Rada, and the latter's work by Alfonso X. See Fernández-Ordóñez (2002/03, 116).
- ¹³ Multiple examples of this mutilation are seen in the Celtic world (Sterckx 2005) and in Iron Age Europe more generally (Armit 2012). See also the case of the decapitation of Bran the Blessed referred to below.
- ¹⁴ With regard to the combat between the hero and his 'triple' adversary in the Indo-European world, such as Hercules and Geryon in Greece, the Horatii and Curiatii in Rome, or Cú Chulainn and the sons of Nechta in Ireland, see Dumézil (1985, 16–25 and 215–34). This hero, as indicated by Lincoln (1976, 43–45), could be represented as the third of a series, or even as triple, as was the case of the triads of the Horatii and Curiatii, or the triplicity of Hercules—a result of his triple conception (Dumézil 1985, 100).
- ¹⁵ On this practice in the Celtic world, see Blaive (2001, 147–54).
- ¹⁶ Regarding the Indo-European cattle-raiding myth, see Lincoln (1976). As is well known, this is the main subject of the most important Irish epic poem, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Dooley 2010), which, despite its common Indo-European roots, has unique differences (Brenneman 1989).
- ¹⁷ A comparison with the Tower of A Coruña can be seen in Delpech (2001, 201–204).
- ¹⁸ These are only speculations without any kind of documentary basis (González García 2012, 186–89).
- ¹⁹ 'The Battle of the Trees', a poem from the *Book of Taliesin*, a thirteenth-century manuscript compilation of Welsh verse (Ford 1977, 17).
- ²⁰ González García (2014) provides more detailed information on these traditions.
- ²¹ As well as the fact that the underlying mythical origins tale was converted into pseudo-history in the *Book of Invasions*, perhaps there is a remnant of the Atlantic contacts that, as some hypotheses based on recent archaeological, linguistic, and genetic research argue, could have spread Celtic culture from hypothetical Iberian roots throughout Western Europe during the Bronze Age (Cunliffe 2010, 20–35; Koch 2013, 135–40; Oppenheimer 2010, 114–47).
- ²² Regarding the meaning of the destination of the voyage of Trezenzonio, see Duzer (2008, 336–39).

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